

The Diploma course of the New Zealand Library School 1974

Patricia Morgan

This assessment of the 1974 course is largely the result of discussion among the students, but I must take final responsibility for the opinions expressed. The aim of the course as I see it should be to get the best from each student according to his or (more usually) her particular aptitudes. A general introduction to librarianship with earlier specialisation could be more valuable, rather than have students attend all lectures and get very little benefit from a number of them.

I would like to stress that the conditions at Library School were rather more difficult for the staff than for the students. Their work load was one reason why assignments took so long to mark. There were 6 people plus the librarian to teach 40 odd Diploma students, as well as 3 (I think) intakes of Certificate students, 40 at a time. The Education Department seems determined to provide library education on the cheap. In addition, the staff get only three weeks holiday each year, which is nowhere near enough for proper professional preparation. The lack of adequate direction from the top meant no real communication between the Director and staff, nor very much coordination so far as the three main parts of the course were concerned. All these factors have an immediate bearing on the Diploma course. The practice of padding out the staff by visiting lecturers was not an overall success. For the most part, with one notable exception who restored our faith in the profession, the visitors were unable to communicate a real enthusiasm and indeed seemed embarrassed at being in such a position. Those who gave practical demonstrations of their skills did better, although our lack of practical experience diminished their usefulness.

The approach to evaluating students—on graduation day we were each handed a slip of paper with our positions in the class, from first to forty-first—was far too rigid. There were three-hour examinations at the end of the first two terms, tests of an hour fortnightly, and continuous assessment through assignments, at times up to five of these at once. The students were all graduates, hand-picked and willing to become librarians—the big stick approach is not needed in this situation.

PATRICIA MORGAN is Librarian, Scots College, Wellington.

The schedule itself was too crowded; there was no time for background reading, or browsing in the books cited. The number of assignments meant too often that they tended to be done hastily, especially in the first term, and in fact 2 of the major 40 hour assignments were never marked at all. The time assigned to these exercises, plus lectures and tutorials, totalled a neat 40 hour week—which bore only a tenuous relationship to the actual 60 or 70 hours worked by most students in order to keep up with assignments. In fact, cooperation between students in answering the reference assignments was the only way in which they could be handed in on time, a method which defeats the purpose of the exercise.

There was apparently no requirement for the lecturers to have any training in the methodology of education, so that with certain exceptions, the standard of teaching was low. The students were lectured at, expected to learn by rote, with little attempt at dialogue by the lecturers. The topics in certain lectures were very poorly covered; for example, the two lectures on serials were almost incomprehensible because of the lack of a grasp of English by the lecturer, who should not have been expected to give any spoken lectures. There was a similar difficulty with the series on the history of the book, although not so marked. In any case, this subject would have been better dealt with as background reading, with perhaps an introductory lecture. The 10 lectures on official papers were a farce—none of us went to all of them, as they mostly consisted of reading lists of official publications. A much more useful way of teaching something of the complexities of these documents to those who intended to work with them would be to produce them, and let them be studied and compared. The assignment for this subject was a 20 hour one; I tried to do without help from the other students, spent 20 hours, did not finish it, and was marked C—as well as receiving a tart comment about my ability in reference work. Very few of the assignments would have been finished if we had kept to the time limit set, but our consciences and fervent desire to become good librarians kept us at it far into the night.

The seminars were particularly frustrating, because the students were slapped down for daring to argue with the so-called superior knowledge and experience. The first three were concerned solely with the semantic differences between works, copies, and texts. I was not alone in finding this an incredible waste of time, especially when we had so much else of pressing importance to study. Our attempts at discussion were largely dismissed contemptuously because of our lack of experience, and the philosophy of the lecturer impeded any real discussion on all but a few occasions, although the students' prepared papers were often thought-provoking and deserved better treatment.

The practical course of three weeks in the third term was marred for most of the students by an unrealistic assignment on the cost benefit analysis of the library. Given the lack of training in account-

ing of almost all of the students, this was far beyond our capacity, and in fact the information was provided for most of us with very little effort required to write it up. This exercise was not marked, and proved of minimal value, although I suspect that it will be used this year to draw conclusions from concerning the real costs of running a library as if the data were statistically accurate.

So much for the destructive criticism. I would now like to offer some points for discussion on the organisation of a diploma course as I see it—without claiming any special authority other than that of having suffered through a year of Library School.

Basically I see the course as a vocational training, rather more comprehensive than the Certificate course, but with the theory cut to a minimum. This is not the view of many, I know. The course could begin with a condensed version of the present lectures on the history and development of the book and the library, with recommended background reading, for much of this seems merely of academic interest in the light of present library development. There would need to be a number of lectures on reference works and the selection of bookstock, with as much practical work as possible. This could then lead on to the cataloguing and classifying section, with less on the theory behind Dewey, Library of Congress, Bliss, etc., and with much more practical work in some of the many libraries in the vicinity of Wellington.

Earlier specialisation, perhaps from the second term, could consist of one or two lectures on each main type of library, with visits, to be followed by tutorials and seminars, one of which would be chosen by the student to do the major part of his/her work for the term. Practical work could then be integrated into this framework, and classification would be of the particular type used in that library. Those who wished to work as cataloguers could take an extra option in this. In fact, if the lectures were staggered and there were sufficient staff, students could take more than one option, but compulsion to attend all lectures would be removed, leaving the student free to pursue other aspects of library work in greater depth. One of my main objections to the course was that I had to sit through the extremely well organised cataloguing and special libraries lectures when I have no interest in either beyond an elementary knowledge.

The most important part of the course I see as the practical part which should be reinforcing of the theory, and the course would have benefited immensely by having more practical experience interspersed with lectures. For example, a lecture on circulation should be followed by some time actually using the system. The Library at Victoria University is perennially short of staff, especially in the Circulation Department, and it should not be difficult to arrange for students to work there in the evenings or weekends, when the pressure is less on staff. It is very difficult to do book selection, cataloguing and classification and evaluation of different circulation

routines in a theoretical vacuum, without reference to an actual library. The library at the School was all but useless as a teaching instrument, and could have been the subject of an assignment in organisation and repair.

There was much talk of the library of the future as a resource centre, but very little in the course made us more than aware of the possibilities. This is an area which will have to receive a great deal more attention in future courses, perhaps in place of the present emphasis on the history of the book, for we have only to look across the Tasman to see the probable line of development, where even some quite small primary school libraries have sophisticated audiovisual equipment.

The critics assignment, where we studied the critical history of a major work, was enjoyable, but not relevant to the way in which book selection is actually carried out in a library. In any case, it was not marked.

Professor W. J. Cameron, Dean of the School of Library and Information Science at the University of Western Ontario, Guelph, visited New Zealand in August 1974. He came to Library School about the middle of the month, and spoke about the way he ran his school. We were especially impressed with the way in which he gave a free hand to the students to organise seminars. Four students meet before hand to split up the topic and work out ways of involving all the students in the discussion and not only the articulate few. In addition, the library is used as an active teaching instrument. The students work out their own systems of circulation, cataloguing, etc., using a large store of uncatalogued books which are available to them. Obviously, we could not copy exactly the system at Guelph, but the willingness to experiment and let the students make their own mistakes contrasted vividly with our regimented system.

I would offer one further suggestion for the reform of the Library School course; if the University takes over the Diploma course it would be appropriate for students to be paid the standard tertiary bursary. This would cut out the few who are looking for a meal ticket, and eliminate the need to sign in and sit through every lecture, as is presently the case.

I must admit that most of the course was valuable, but too much of it was badly organised and presented. So long as it is the only training for professional librarians in this country we must speak out on its disadvantages, if possible without giving personal offence. As it was, the best thing about the 1974 course was the calibre of the students who succeeded in spite of the almost overwhelming work load in emerging in December with their sanity intact and their Diplomas in their hands!